

WorkFirst / Office of Financial Management Surveys: Summer 2004

Are Washington's neediest families getting the help the state can offer? Are working parents using child care subsidies? Do they even know the subsidies are available? Why would a low-income family with three young children choose not to use Medical coupons? Do immigrant families know that they are eligible for TANF? Are there specific groups around the state who know less than others about the benefits they can use?

Washington WorkFirst has been struggling with these and related questions since the program began in 1997. We know that family self-sufficiency is a long road for many, and that income and other supports help families move in the right direction down that road. Seven years of research has taught us a great deal about the families that use TANF and other supports. But we know very little about the families who *don't* use these supports. Are there barriers to accessing services that we can breach? Should we be doing more to reach out to them?

In response to these recurring questions, the WorkFirst Performance Team, part of the Office of Financial Management, is conducting two statewide surveys over the summer and fall of 2004. The surveys are designed to reach families that are theoretically eligible for state support services (specifically: WorkFirst/Temporary Aid for Needy Families, Basic Food/food stamps, Medicaid, community college tuition assistance, WIC, the federal earned income tax credit, and Working Connections child care subsidies), and asks them what they know about these programs and their decisions to use or not use each service. One survey, (the 'benefits survey') asks broadly about all seven services; the second survey focuses in greater detail on the decision to use or not use child care subsidies.

The benefits survey will reach 1000 individuals and the child care survey will reach 300, and both are aimed at families with incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level. Targeting techniques are being employed to reach a significant number of racial and ethnic minorities. For the benefits survey, special emphasis is placed on two recent immigrant groups—Vietnamese and Russian/Ukrainian. For the child care subsidies survey, the focus will be on families who have used subsidies in the past and have chosen to stop doing so.

The surveys are being conducted by telephone. Interviewers who speak Spanish, Vietnamese, and Russian will be available, as well as other languages as needed. Gilmore Research of Seattle is conducting the benefits survey interviews. The child care subsidy interviews are being conducted by DSHS' Research and Data Analysis surveying team. The survey instruments were designed by a team of researchers from OFM, DSHS, ESD, and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy. The benefits survey falls under the jurisdiction of the Human Subjects Review Board, and at this time has passed conditional review. Data and findings for both studies will be available by November 2004.

For more information, or for copies of the survey instruments, please contact Debbie Zeidenberg about the benefits survey [(360) 902-0620, debbie.zeidenberg@ofm.wa.gov] or Deb Came about the child care subsidies survey [(360) 902-0491, debra.came@ofm.wa.gov].